



Above: Conferees check out Literacy Study Group modules in the IRA Marketplace. Below: When the day was over, conferees enjoyed San Antonio's famous Riverwalk.



Double the fun: Sessions present authors in pairs

Attendees at the IRA Annual Convention love getting to hear their favorite authors. One popular series of sessions offered twice the fun, pairing two authors together for an hour-long session. Here's an overview of two of these paired sessions.

On Monday afternoon, authors Gillian Chan and Brian Yansky spoke about their personal experiences with books and how they came to write for the young adult literature market. Chan, a former high school teacher, and Yansky, currently teaching at Austin Community College, address adolescent readers from different angles. Chan draws upon family history and personal interaction, while Yansky "relates to the teenage mentality" and writes from that perspective.

Chan credited her husband and his parents as the inspiration for the family dynamic in the short story "Small Town Napoleon," found in *Golden Girl and other stories* (Kids Can Press, 1997). In this story, a Chinese boy hides his love of theater from his parents, who would disapprove of his desire to act. She claimed that her husband channeled his own parents' strict beliefs and values and infused them into these characters.

A conversation with her father about his service in World War II compelled Chan to write *A Foreign Field* (Kids Can Press, 2004), a riveting wartime novel whose cover features a photo of her uncle, later shot down at the age of 19. Her latest novel, *The Turning* (Kids Can Press, 2005) explores a father-son relationship involving an absent father and an angry son and the circumstances that force them into starting a new life together.

Brian Yansky began by saying he grew up in a home environment that discouraged reading and became engaged in fiction only after enrolling in a creative writing class. He believes that people connect with fiction, and it is this connection that makes reading worthwhile.

Yansky's novel, *My Road Trip to the Pretty Girl Capital of the World* (Cricket Books, 2003), is a rather light-hearted account of one boy's struggle with identity and ensuing feelings of isolation stemming from his discovery of being adopted. He embarks on a journey to find his birth parents and, ultimately, to find himself. Yansky is presently researching homeless children and runaways for his next work.

Kevin O'Malley and Patrick O'Brien, author and illustrator of *Captain Raptor and the Moon Mystery* (Walker Books, 2005), spoke to a small group of convention attendees Thursday afternoon about how their dinosaurs-in-space adventure came to fruition. O'Malley and O'Brien told their story in turn, pausing at times to sketch characters from the book and take questions from the audience.

While visiting an editorial office in New York City, O'Malley saw O'Brien's dinosaur art displayed on the walls and offered to write a story about the dinosaurs in spacesuits. On the train home, O'Malley's vision for the story materialized: The book would be a di-

ary of the cook on a dinosaur spaceship, a concept O'Brien confessed he did not initially embrace. After further collaboration, the story morphed into an exploration by Captain Raptor's crew of an alien craft that has crashed on the moon of Eon.

O'Brien, an admitted art-school dropout, distributed original watercolor paintings from the book. He described his artistic style as being influenced by 1950s sci-fi and adventure tales as well as by *Buck Rogers* and *Star Wars*. O'Malley's illustrations follow more closely those of comic book conventions—pictures and text in frames, printing select words in bold-face type.

Discussion of certain aspects of the collaborative process, such as naming characters and omitting inappropriate content, sparked a spirited but good-natured debate between O'Malley and O'Brien. When someone addressed a statement to O'Malley about boys' disinclination to read for fun, he stressed the importance of teachers finding books whose subjects are of interest to boys.

O'Brien, who also writes nonfiction children's literature, and O'Malley, who recently finished *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude* (Walker Books, 2005), have expressed interest in producing a sequel to *Captain Raptor and the Moon Mystery*.

Christina Lambert, senior editorial assistant in the Journals Department of the International Reading Association, prepared this article for *Reading Today*. ■

IRA seeks proposal reviewers

The International Reading Association seeks members to serve as volunteer reviewers who will help screen program proposals for the 51st Annual Convention. The convention, which revolves around the theme "Great Teachers Inspire the World," will be held April 30–May 4, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

If you are available to review proposals during the first two weeks of July, contact Carol Dunn at cdesantis@reading.org. ■

IRA website offers presentation materials

IRA is pleased to once again make handouts and other presentation materials from the annual convention available through its website. Presenters have been invited to e-mail their materials to IRA headquarters for Web posting. Many have done so.

Even if you could not attend the convention, you can still get the flavor of some of the sessions. Look in the convention area of the Association's website at www.reading.org. ■

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